

My name is Alicia Skillman. I am the Executive Director of the Triangle Foundation and have a vested interest in this hearing today.

Discrimination is a daily challenge for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in Michigan, putting a significant number of our residents at risk of both physical violence and other debilitating consequences.

I know this personally in several ways. One is that before coming to Triangle Foundation I practiced civil rights law. I was the Director of the Fair Housing Center of Legal Aid & Defender Association. We provided testing, litigation and various resolutions in housing discrimination cases throughout Oakland & Macomb Counties.

I'm here today to provide evidence from one particular housing discrimination study, "Sexual Orientation and Housing Discrimination in Michigan", a report of Michigan's Fair Housing Centers. This report was updated in 2007 and is believed to be the largest study done in Michigan of housing discrimination and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and the transgender community.

The Report of the Michigan Fair Housing Centers clearly documents that the LGBT community suffers discrimination when trying to secure housing for ourselves and our families. Those of us who live and work as LGBT people are not surprised by the findings.

In the study, pairs of testers were sent out to inquire about rental housing, homes for sale, or home financing options. The treatment of same sex "life partners" was compared to the treatment of a "married heterosexual" couples. The same sex couples also were given better credentials – higher income, better credit, and larger down payments.

The housing discrimination found in the report includes everything from failing to give rental applications, charging higher amounts of monthly payments, outright sexual harassment, including naming homosexuality as a "prohibited activity" for potential renters.

The nightmare of anti-GLBT discrimination is intensified when a person seeks justice in combating the prejudice only to find out that there is no state-wide protection --*no legal recourse*-- in Michigan. Here, justice depends on whether the municipality where the discrimination took place has an ordinance prohibiting discrimination in housing based on sexual orientation. If you outside of the right jurisdiction, you're outside of the law.

Those cities are Ann Arbor, Birmingham*, Dearborn Heights, Detroit, Village of Douglas, City of Douglas, East Lansing, Ferndale, Flint, Grand Ledge, Grand Rapids, Hunting Woods, Lansing, Saginaw*, Saugatuck & Ypsilanti.

While we applaud the sixteen Michigan cities that have banned anti-gay and lesbian discrimination in housing, they have not solved this problem. The basic right of being

treated fairly when searching for a home should not be determined by jurisdictional lines. Safe shelter—a place to live—is a basic right for all of us.

We are grateful for the commitment by the Fair Housing Centers to uncover and expose the egregious fact of anti-gay discrimination in Michigan's housing markets.

However, we are here today with supportive allies asking you to take a step toward ending all discrimination in Michigan.

Michigan finds itself today, in 2009, dealing with a stalling economy and horrific housing market. Now would be the time to provide protection from housing discrimination for the lgbt people.

States and cities that restrict rights for lgbt people tend to be in the bottom ranking for attracting high-tech business. Michigan can again become a region of economic prosperity when it is open and inclusive to everyone.

Fortunately though, we do have a clear and present opportunity to implement one of the report's recommendations: amending the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to protect the LGBT community from discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations. H.B. 4192 will do just that.

[Tell Story]

Today, you can help create a real chance of advancing, thus correcting one of the most dangerous and persistent omissions in Michigan law and help keep more families.

By passing H.B. 4192, we will bring all of the residents of Michigan one step closer to true equality, whether in finding a place to stop for a meal, a place to work, or to find basic shelter.

Triangle Foundation has been proud to assist the Fair Housing Centers in accomplishing the work that went into the findings in this report, and we praise their courage and diligence in the completion of this work. Triangle is dedicated to bringing the reality of anti-GLBT discrimination out of the closet across Michigan. With this report the Fair Housing Centers have helped to define this grave injustice. It is good to be able to stand with them.